

Montana Department of
Public Health & Human Services

Section:

Non-TANF Child Care Eligibility

CHILD CARE

Subject:

Application Process

Supersedes: **Child Care 2-1 (9/1/06)**

References: **52-2-701 - 704 & 52-2-711 - 713 MCA; Sections 37.80.101-103, 37.80.201-202, 37.80.205-206, 37.80.301-302, 37.80.305 -306, 37.80.315-316, 37.80.501 ARM; 45 CFR Part 98.20 – 47**

General Rule

A family may apply for a Non-TANF Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship in person, by mail, or by fax through one of the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies within the state. If the applicant is eligible and there is no waiting list, the eligibility begin-date is established when the CCR&R receives a completed application.

A family participating in the TANF Cash Assistance program may apply for Non-TANF, if the family believes that a Non-TANF Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship will alleviate the need for the TANF Cash benefit.

NOTE: Some local charitable organizations and churches may offer stopgap child care subsidies while families wait for a Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship. This stopgap subsidy does not preclude the family's eligibility for child care scholarship by eliminating the need for care, if the stopgap subsidy is designed to end when a child care scholarship becomes available.

Eligibility Begin-Date

The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship eligibility begin-date is the date the completed application demonstrates eligibility, including the need for child care, due to the parent's activity hours.

EXAMPLE: A family submits an application that shows all household members' demographic data, current income, need for care, and compliance with Child Support. The application date will be the date the application was received at the R&R. Eligibility will be determined when all supporting documentation is received.

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EXAMPLE: A family submits an application that shows all household members' demographic data, current income, need for care, and compliance with Child Support. However, the need for child care (employment or school attendance) begins on a future date. When need for child care is documented, the application date will be the date that the family is eligible and has a need for child care. The application may be entered into CCUBS using the date received with the understanding that the application date does not match the date the family demonstrates eligibility.

The application date in CCUBS is an enterable field. Eligibility specialists should enter the later date; either the date the application was received at the CCR&R or the subsequent date the family demonstrated a need for care. The application date cannot be a future date. All applications must be entered into CCUBS.

Gathering Information

Information needed to prospect the family's eligibility is gathered from application materials and by interviewing the parent(s). Use investigative interviewing skills, such as asking if a reported change is expected to continue, and look for a pattern of overtime pay to gather complete information:

- ❑ **Prospecting Household Composition:**
 - Who is related by marriage or parentage?
 - Is a natural or adoptive parent absent?
 - Is child support ordered, through a court or CSED?
 - Are household changes anticipated? If so, when?
- ❑ **Prospecting Income Eligibility:**
 - What type of job?
 - What is the nature of the job (e.g., seasonal, on call, sporadic, contingent on weather conditions, etc.)?
 - What is the rate of pay?
 - How often are the household members paid or receive income?

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- How many hours are worked per week.
- Do hours fluctuate?
- Is overtime pay a regular occurrence?
- Do the children have income?
- Is child support received?

□ **Prospecting Household Activity Eligibility:**

- Are household members working the minimum number of hours to meet the hourly work requirement?
- Is there a need for care?
- Are parents available to care for the child(ren)?
- Are parent(s) attending approved school/training?
- Are child(ren) in school?

If the parent anticipates changes in household membership or changes in the reason for child care, set the length of the child care certification plan to end when the household change occurs. Once income eligibility is correctly determined, income fluctuations alone will not change eligibility for the duration of the child care certification plan.

Information provided by the family must be verified with corroborative documents and/or statements from third parties (i.e., employers, landlords, relatives, etc.). If needed, the CCR&R provides assistance in gathering and verifying family information.

⇒ Case-note the process used to determine eligibility and state what verification documentations were received.

**Application
Process:**

All Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship applications must be entered into CCUBS whether they have been approved or denied.

The parent completes the following application process to receive a Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship.

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The parent contacts the district CCR&R agency. The agency provides the following information to the family:

- ☐ Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship application and benefit information (e.g. Child Care Scholarships brochure DPHHS-HCS/CC-009);
- ☐ Information on selecting quality child care; and
- ☐ Information on child care resource and referral services.

**Timely
Processing –
30 days**

At the time the initial application is submitted, the parent completes the following forms and returns them to the CCR&R office by appointment or by mail. The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Application (DPHHS-HCS/CC-010) is valid for 30 days from the date it is received (date stamped) in the CCR&R office. The CCR&R date-stamp establishes the application-received date, which marks the beginning of the application period.

EXCEPTION: The applicant may receive one 15-day extension to submit required documentation in the possession of a third party, provided the applicant submits a request for an extension before the expiration of the 30-day application period.

⇒ Case-note the extension of the application period.

If the application materials are not complete in the time allotted, the CCR&R shall deny the application and document the facts in case notes. All applications, whether approved or denied, shall be entered into CCUBS.

a) Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Application (DPHHS-HCS/CC-010). The CCR&R date-stamps the complete application when it is received. A complete application includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ☐ Names of all household members;
- ☐ Social Security Numbers of all household members (The CCR&R must make an effort to obtain Social Security Numbers of all household members, but should not deny eligibility based on not receiving this information in and of itself.);
- ☐ Birth date of all household members;

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- ☐ Address of head-of-household;
 - ☐ Income (may be estimated);
 - ☐ Activity hours, demonstrating the need for child care (may be estimated);
 - ☐ Child support compliance;
 - ☐ Release of Information initialed and signed; and
 - ☐ Applicant signature, with date.
- b) Request for Work/Training Verification (DPHHS-HCS/CC-011) is required for each working household member, completed and signed by each employer. If each member cannot obtain a signature from their employer, the last two months of wage stubs are acceptable. At least one type of verification is required for each adult attending school/training. School/Training may be verified by completing this form and having it signed by the training institution or by providing a copy of the student's official schedule/bill.
- c) Verify Social Security numbers and birth certificates of all eligible household members.
NOTE: If OPA has entered this information into TEAMS, accept this information as verified. Do not require it again.
- d) Verify child support for each child, cooperation with child support enforcement, or grant good cause for not cooperating with child support with the Child Care Program – Notice of Requirement to Cooperate and Right to Claim Good Cause for Refusal to Cooperate in Child Support Enforcement (DPHHS-HCS/CC-019) form. The CCR&R must obtain verification when granting good cause, as outlined in Section 2-2.
- e) Tribal families, who are dually eligible for CCDF, must provide written confirmation that they are not being served by their Tribal CCDF program.

The parent needs to establish who their child care provider is. If the parent

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selects an approved licensed/registered child care provider, the CCR&R Eligibility Specialist may collect child care provider information in three ways:

- ☐ The parent and the provider may complete the Child Care Service Plan Information (DPHHS-HCS/CC-015) form together, which verifies the child care arrangements;
- ☐ If the family is using an existing approved child care provider, the CCR&R may already have the information necessary to issue a child care certification plan by accessing the provider information in CCUBS; or
- ☐ The parent can provide child care provider information in the Best Beginnings Scholarship application.

Child Care Certification Plan

When Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarships are approved, the parent and the child care provider each receive a copy of the child care certification plan. The recommended standard time frame for a certification plan is a 6-month period for Non-TANF families, 3-month period for TANF families, and 3-month period for CPS children. CCR&R Eligibility Specialists have the right to shorten a certification plan if the parent's need for child care is uncertain through a certain time period other than the recommended standards of time for the TANF, Non-TANF and CPS participants. See Section 6-3 for Issuing the Child Care Certification Plan.

Limitation of Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship

The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship hours approved must mirror the approved parent's and child's activities:

- ☐ Parent's work, school, & FIA activities requiring child care, allowing for travel time.
- ☐ The child's schedule, e.g., school, or alternative care arrangements.

Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarships are not intended for respite care, unless services are provided under Child Protective Services.

A parent may not provide reciprocal care for the sole purpose of meeting work program requirements or collecting scholarship payments. Parents in a

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reciprocal care arrangement must demonstrate that their schedules complement each other's need for child care.

For details, see Issuing the Certification Plan as outlined in Section 6-3.

LUP Application Date If the provider is not licensed or registered, an In-home Care and/or Legally Unregistered Provider Application for State Payment Only (DPHHS-HCS/CC-087) form must be completed by the provider and submitted to the local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency for approval before a child care certification plan can be completed. A Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship cannot be provided before the receipt date of the completed LUP application or the parent's approval date, whichever is later.

- ⇒ Make a case note to document the specific case circumstances.
- ⇒ Date-stamp all application materials and verification documents.

Re-certification - Parent/CCR&R Re-certification is conducted periodically, usually every six months. Certification plans may be shorter if the CCR&R Eligibility Specialist prospects a household change, which suggests household or activity requirements need to be evaluated sooner. CCUBS sends out a re-certification reminder notice six weeks before the end of the certification, reminding parents to re-certify. It is the parent's responsibility to contact the CCR&R for re-certification.

If families do not re-certify by the end of the certification date, no additional closure notice is mailed. The certification plan reminder and certification plan notice serve as a notice. Close the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship effective the certification end-date.

Forms must be kept current, within one year old. If eligibility factors change or a form will become over one year old during the new certification plan, the CCR&R Eligibility Specialist shall request updates for the following:

- Work/Training Verification (DPHHS-HCS/CC-011) form completed and signed by the employer and or training institution if the participant has either changed jobs, or it is a new school semester. If neither

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change has occurred, then a class schedule or wage stubs would suffice.

- ❑ Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Application (DPHHS-HCS/CC-C10) form, if the household information has changed.
- ❑ Verify receipt of court-ordered child support for each child, cooperation with child support enforcement or grant good cause for not cooperating with child support with the Child Care Program – Notice of Requirement to Cooperate and Right to Claim Good Cause for Refusal to Cooperate in Child Support Enforcement (DPHHS-HCS/CC-019) form.
- ❑ At each recertification, the CCR&R Eligibility Specialist shall compare the previous month's invoices to the Explanation of Benefits and to the parent's wage stubs, work schedules, school schedules, etc. to insure billing accuracy. If questions arise in the review, refer to Invoice & Payment Process, as outlined in Section 6-7 and Overpayments, as outlined in Section 6-9.

CCR&R Business Processes

In order to ensure consistent application processing across the State, CCR&Rs will follow the following process when accepting Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship applications:

1. Register the application on CCUBS.
2. Ensure the completeness of the application.
3. Interview the applicant either by phone or in person to determine accuracy of documents submitted and to request any missing documentation.
4. If information is missing to determine eligibility, using CCUBS, send a Request for Information (RFI) notice to the family, requesting the information be submitted to the CCR&R within 30 days from the date the application was received in the CCR&R office.
5. Set an alert to check the status of the application in 30 days.
6. Determine eligibility by processing the completed application, or deny the application if missing documents have not been submitted within the allotted time period.

Waiting List

When the demand for Non-TANF Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarships exceeds the resources, the Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) maintains

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a statewide waiting list. The Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) will select children from the Non-TANF waiting list, based on budget projections.

As a budget management strategy, the ECSB may serve families up to a specified level of poverty. Families participating in the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship may remain in the program up to the upper limits of the sliding fee scale, subject to change reporting and re-certification policies.

CCUBS will send a notice to families of children selected from the waiting list. The family must respond within the 10-day timeframe to re-determine eligibility and secure their child care scholarship.

The CCR&R shall close the following cases:

- ☐ Families who do not respond within the 10-day timeframe.
- ☐ Families who are determined ineligible after being selected from the waiting list.

Priorities

A priority system is in place for Non-TANF Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarships. Families who have children with special needs are given priority and are not subject to the waiting list. Among other Non-TANF applicants, priority is determined according to the following:

- ☐ Teen parents attending high school, GED, or equivalency programs;
- ☐ Families with lower income, relative to family size.

If families are equally eligible, the family with the earliest eligibility begin-date will be given priority.

Begin-Date, When Selected From the Waiting List

When the department has instituted a Waiting List for Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarships, a family's begin date will be determined by the following:

Full Income Eligible Waiting List: All families must wait until funding is available:

- ☐ If selected from the waiting list during the family's application month, the child care scholarship may begin on the application date.
- ☐ If selected from the waiting list after the family's application month, the

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child care scholarship may begin on the first of the month in which the family is selected from the waiting list.

Partial Income Eligible Waiting List – Families may enter the Best Beginnings Scholarship program if they are income eligible, under a specified level of poverty:

- ☐ If families are being served up to a specified level of poverty and the only delay involves waiting list processing which happens to cross the month end, an eligible family may begin a scholarship on the application date.

Waiting List Exceptions

Children with special needs are guaranteed child care assistance. Other policy exceptions will be managed as they arise. To request an exception, enter a case note on CCUBS and e-mail ECSB the following information with a request to remove the child(ren) from the waiting list:

- ☐ Child's name,
- ☐ Child's county, and
- ☐ CCUBS case number.

Children With Special Needs

If you have an application with a child(ren) with special needs, contact ECSB. 'Special Needs' is outlined in Section 1-4a of the child care manual. A child may have 'special needs' status with respect to waiting list priority even though the 'special needs rate' is not applicable for the child.

Policy Exception

When unusual circumstances occurs, which create a non-TANF waiting list policy exception, e-mail the Department. See Section 6-13 for Department staff lists.

Examples of unusual circumstance include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ☐ A non-TANF 'Application' date more than 30 days prior to the 'Status Date' on the CCUBS 'Program Funding Waitlist' screen;
- ☐ Retroactive changes resulting from a fair hearing;
- ☐ Provider grant recipient; or
- ☐ Worker error.

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Presumptive Eligibility

When a waiting list is not in effect, families may be presumed eligible for the 30-day application period, while application information is verified. This provides the child care provider some assurance of payment for initial services. Presumptive eligibility is allowed once within a twelve-month period per family. No overpayment is due if the family is determined ineligible. However, if the household provides false information for the purpose of receiving child care assistance from a presumptive eligibility determination, the household will be responsible for repaying the overpayment. Families seeking presumptive eligibility must submit the following:

- The complete Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Application (DPHHS-HCS/CC-010) form, which indicates the family is likely to be eligible.

CCR&R:

- ⇒ Check case notes, for “Presumptive Eligibility” to determine if the family has used presumptive eligibility within the last twelve months.
- ⇒ Setup a 30-day certification plan.
- ⇒ Enter a case note, using “Presumptive Eligibility” as the note category.
- ⇒ If the verification process indicates the family is not eligible:
 - Deny the case,
 - Close the case, and
 - Send a copy of the denial notice to the provider.
- ⇒ The closure date should be the same as the end-date on the certification plan.
- ⇒ Do not process an overpayment if the family is determined to be ineligible, unless eligibility information was misrepresented.

